WEEKEND JOURNAL.

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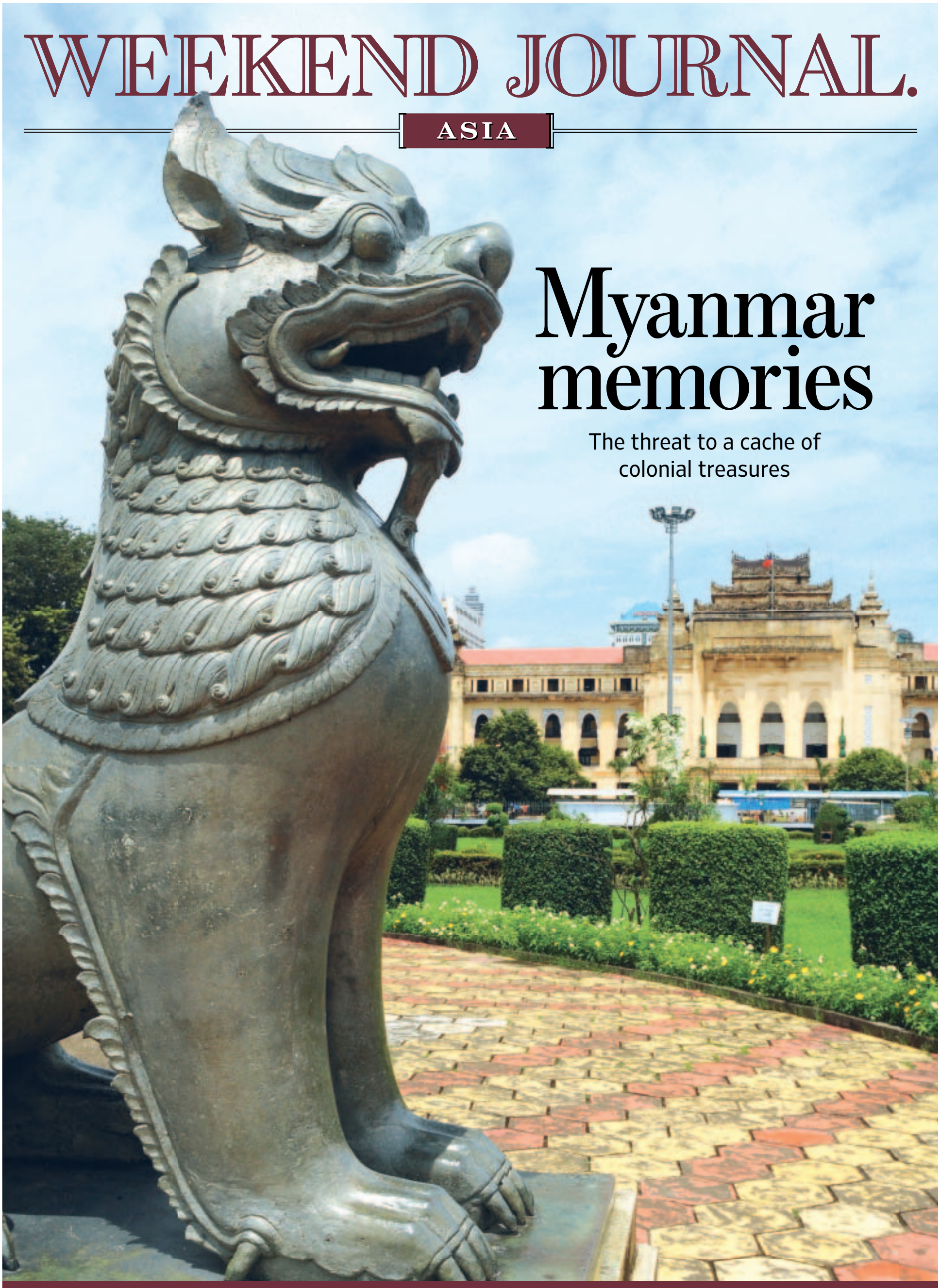

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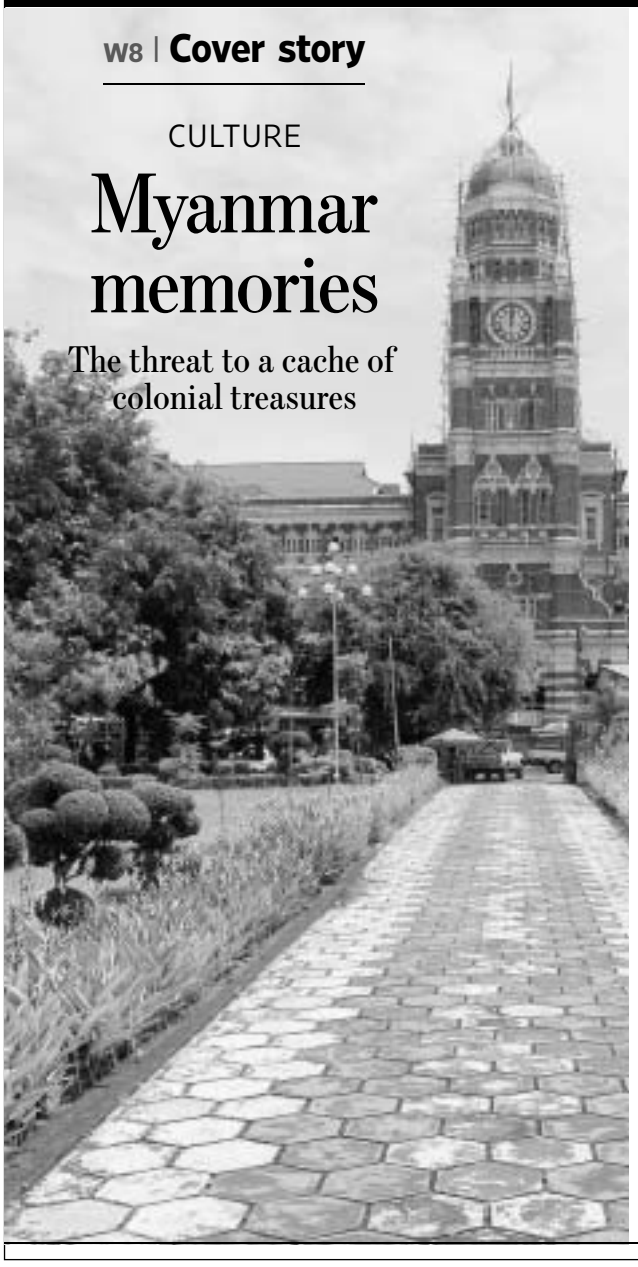

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THE JOURNAL CROSSWORD / Edited by Mike Shenk

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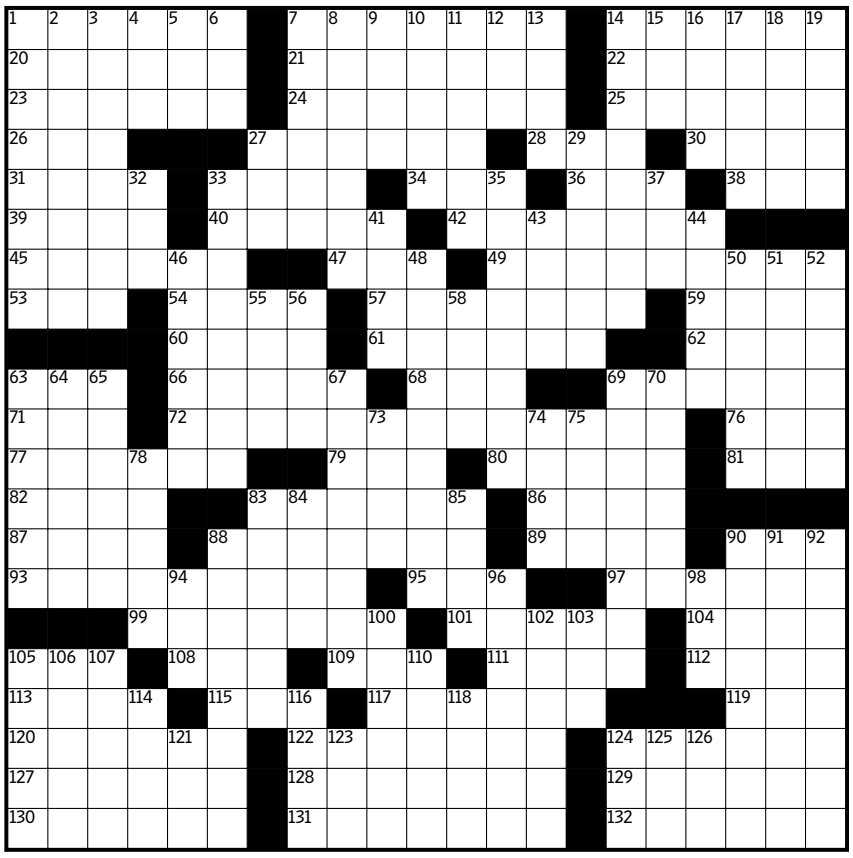
Washington Square / by Elizabeth C. Gorski



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WSJ.com/WeekendJournal

Last Week's Solution

Tamara Mellon, top left; the back of the closet is reserved for jeans and a few pairs of sneakers, top right

Move over, Imelda

Tamara Mellon's shoe collection has the 'Marcos' of excellence

By Rachel Dodes

New York

Last April, before she could move into a 7,140-square-foot penthouse duplex previously owned by beverage scion Edgar Bronfman Jr., Tamara Mellon first had to make more room for her shoes.

Ms. Mellon, founder of the Jimmy Choo label, known for its towering stilettos worn by the characters on "Sex and the City," hired a contractor to knock down a wall and expand her closet by nearly two meters to help accommodate her collection. She's unsure how many pairs she owns, having lost count after 800, but says virtually all are Jimmy Choo, with the exception of a pair of Ugg boots and a couple of pairs of Nike sneakers.

Her new closet, an L-shaped space about 4.5 by seven meters at its widest, uses angled shelves that provide more visibility to her hundreds of shoes, which sit two pairs deep. (Roughly half of Ms. Mellon's shoes are stored elsewhere.) The blond-wood shelves and hanging bars allow nearly everything to be seen, an arrangement she finds more efficient. "My big issue in life is time. I never have enough," said 42-year-old Ms. Mellon. "If I am trying to find something in my closet and I can't find it, it drives me crazy."

Excavating her iPhone from a large Jimmy Choo alligator bag, Ms. Mellon demonstrated her other organizational trick: photograph herself in various outfits so she won't forget about them later on. She pulled up an image of herself in a black Prada dress, which she was considering for an awards event.

Aside from her shoes and a sizable number of handbags, Ms. Mellon's clothing collection veers towards simpler pieces. A sliver of solid-colored dresses is at the end, with a sea of black and navy dominating the hanging area, and jeans get their own section. The basic styles help offset more flamboyant accessories, like a pair of fluorescent yellow heels and a tasseled black bag that Ms. Mellon likes to pair with jeans for a hard-edged bohemian look. Her evening wear is stored in the basement in garment bags, with photographs identifying what's inside.

Scott Pasfield for The Wall Street Journal (4)

While her go-to styles change by the season, Ms. Mellon, who designs all of Jimmy Choo's collections, said she perennially returns to "Private," a platform sandal with a zipper running up its back. "It's a shape that every woman can wear and it's got a modern volume to it," she said of the shoes, which reveal a thin sliver of skin atop the foot. She's also partial to the lizard-clad version of the "Glenys" gladiator pump, which has a zipper running up its center.

Ms. Mellon, who by 5 p.m. on a recent weekday had worn three different pairs of shoes, called herself "the inspiration, the heart and soul" of Jimmy Choo. Her jet-setting lifestyle certainly draws attention as the paparazzi nip at her high heels. Following a 2005 divorce from American banking heir Matthew Mellon, Ms. Mellon was romantically linked to singer Kid Rock, among others; she confirms she dated Christian Slater. (Mr. Slater couldn't be reached for comment.)

Recently, she was awarded £6 million, or $9.5 million, in a lawsuit filed on the island of Jersey in the U.K., against her mother. (Her mother's attorney had no comment.) Ms. Mellon said she's estranged from her family and moved to New York partly because she wanted her daughter to be closer to her ex-husband. "I didn't realize people would be so interested in my personal life," she said.

There's been drama in her business life as well. In 2007, a boardroom scuffle resulted in the departure of former Chief Executive Robert Bensoussan, and Ms. Mellon orchestrated a deal to sell a majority stake to TowerBrook Capital Partners for $350 million. "For me, this [company] is my baby," said Ms. Mellon. "I was fighting for that." Mr. Bensoussan, who now runs his own private-equity fund, had no comment.

In 1996, Ms. Mellon believed there was room in the high-end footwear market for a brand that could capture Hollywood glamour. With a $250,000 investment from her late father, the entrepreneur behind the Vidal Sassoon hair-care empire, she created a luxury brand from scratch, partnering with Mr. Choo, a custom-footwear maker for elite clients like Princess Diana.

The few drawers house jewelry and lingerie, left; the 'Private' shoe in gold, $950, above, is part of the new '24/7' collection

Accustomed to designing shoes one at a time, Mr. Choo was unable to sketch an entire collection, so Ms. Mellon became "a designer by default," she said. The luxury-shoe boom of the 1990s catapulted Jimmy Choo, which sells shoes ranging from $350 flats to $1,395 over-the-knee boots, into the big leagues. The brand now operates more than 100 stores globally and does an estimated $200 million in annual sales.

Since the downturn, Ms. Mellon has been focusing her brand on conveying enduring value. To that end, she turned to her closet for inspiration, designing a new line called "24/7," featuring recreations of about 30 of her favorite styles from seasons past. "I want great investment pieces that look modern, that I can pull out of my closet in two years and they will still look great," said Ms. Mellon.

Outside her closet along the wall of her bedroom sat 37 pairs of shoes lined up in three rows. The shoes, for the company's spring 2010 collection, had just arrived, and she had nowhere to put them.

"I wanted to keep my guest bedroom clear," she said, adding that she may have to turn it into a shoe closet after all.

Carpet sweepers

Designers' decision: Which star best sells my look?

Reuters (2)

By Christina Binkley

With the Academy Award nominations out, fashion designers are already jockeying to dress the stars for their big night. But rather than trying to pick the Oscar winners or the most fashionable celebrities, designers should be asking another question: Who will be the most effective at getting viewers to buy the clothes they see on the red carpet?

Among this year's nominees, the "best seller" award is likely to go to a nominee whom few in the fashion world are discussing: Sandra Bullock. At StyleSpot.com, a Los Angeles-based Web site that links red-carpet photos to stores that sell the looks, Ms. Bullock's Vivienne Westwood dress at the People's Choice Awards ranked among the top of all red-carpet appearances this year in inspiring viewers to "click through" to retail sites.

One lesson: It isn't pure chic that moves clothes. "For the most part, celebrities that drive sales aren't necessarily the ones that get nominated" for awards, says Lily Hollander, editorial director of StyleSpot .com. The 45-year-old Ms. Bullock has a down-to-earth image that means millions of women relate to her.

By contrast, with her Best Actress Oscar nomination for "An Education" this week, Carey Mulligan has dozens of fashion designers vying to lend her baubles and gowns for the Oscars. The young actress with the pixie haircut is known as a sophisticated dresser. "Carey Mulligan will be the most watched on Vogue.com," says Hamish Bowles, Vogue's European editor at large, recalling a sparkling Prada dress the actress wore recently.

But despite Ms. Mulligan's fashion credibility, she may not be the savviest choice for product placement. At StyleSpot .com, Ms. Mulligan is not one of the stars who moves the most viewers to buy clothes. Ms. Mulligan wasn't available to comment.

Celebrity placement is more voodoo than science, but among this year's nominees, other Oscar sales influencers may include plus-size Gabourey Sidibe and the classic Meryl Streep. Ms. Sidibe, the star of "Precious," is "an alternate paradigm for the red carpet, but she can carry these very strong colors," says Mr. Bowles. What's more, the plus-size market is one of fashion's fastest growing.

And Ms. Streep's maturity and demure style choices may appeal to women over 40, who spend more on fashion than other demographic groups.

Among top StyleSpot.com sellers who aren't current Oscar nominees, Kate Hudson and Drew Barrymore are in a sweet spot—fashionable, and young enough to inspire Internet shoppers, yet not so young that they're attracting teens or college-aged women, who don't have a lot of money for clothes.

A number of sites track what celebrities wear so that viewers can copy the styles. But red-carpet photos are at the heart of StyleSpot's strategy. The site, which launched last year, links celebrity red-carpet photos to online retail stores from Neiman Marcus and Barneys to Amazon.

Gabourey Sidibe, top left, nominated for best actress, at the Critics' Choice Awards; Jessica Alba, bottom left, at January's People's Choice Awards, where her sandals created a stir

Photos: Associated Press

◀ **Sandra Bullock's** huge fan base and girl-next-door image have made her a potent fashion seller. Here, she arrives at last month's Golden Globes in a Bottega Veneta gown.

Penelope Cruz has high shopper appeal. At the Screen Actors Guild, she wore a dress by L'Wren Scott.

Meryl Streep's maturity and pristine fashion choices may appeal to the huge over-40 market. She arrived at the Screen Actors Guild wearing a spring Balenciaga gown.

Maggie Gyllenhaal's insider choices make her a fashion darling but could alienate some consumers. She wore iconoclastic Roland Mouret to the Golden Globes.

Carey Mulligan tops many designers' wish lists for her risk-taking and love of fashion. But these same factors may make her less widely influential. She wore a Nina Ricci gown to the Golden Globes.

com. StyleSpot's database compiles images from red-carpet events and organizes them by star, event and designer brand. The site, which estimates its unique monthly audience at around 10 million people, earns revenue as a percentage of sales when consumers click on a photo and purchase the related item.

Red carpets have become a primary marketing channel for fashion. The Academy Award nominees' photos will be plastered from Boise to Beijing after the March 7 awards show, which will be watched by many millions of television viewers—and seen on a gazillion blogs. It's an irresistible advertising medium. In Los Angeles, designers employ VIP handlers, who work to get the designers' clothes on celebrities who might be photographed in them.

The fashion industry does this because it works. After Sienna Miller wore Thakoon's spring bustier jumper to the premiere of the fashion documentary "The September Issue," every store that bought the piece sold out, says a spokeswoman for designer Thakoon Panichgul.

Yet success, for a designer, is a delicate balance of star power and timing. After Jessica Alba presented an award at the People's Choice awards last month, her Burberry Prorsum knotted platform sandals generated the most click-throughs to retail sites of any red-carpet appearance this season on StyleSpot.

Unfortunately for Burberry, those spring-season shoes won't be available in stores for another month. So shoppers had to settle for similar looks offered on the site by Robert Clergerie and Callisto.

Of course, there are ancillary benefits. High-profile fashion publicist Karla Otto, who recently opened a Los Angeles VIP office, says any appearance by an A-List actress "sells product from clothing to accessories and, if the consumer can't afford the attire, they might buy the fragrance or the beauty products."

Brands' publicists fire off press releases the minute their star steps outside. During last month's Grammy Awards, Emilio Pucci announced that singer/actress Fergie appeared in its blue strapless dress, while Judith Leiber announced she carried a Leiber clutch. Each time Fergie wore Missoni in Cannes in late January, the brand shot out a release. "I hope that others will be influenced by her great personal style," said designer Angela Missoni in an email.

Nothing is too minor for mention. Stylist Mark Townsend announced that he set actress January Jones's hair in a French twist for the Golden Globes, blow drying her hair "with a round brush" and securing "it with about 10 bobby pins." He also named hair products and prices: Moroccanoil Treatment, $39 for 100 milliliters.

Dressing Angelina Jolie, Anne Hathaway and Kyra Sedgwick in one-of-a-kind vintage gowns has rubbed off in sales of totally unrelated clothes, says Juliana Cairone, owner of the New York vintage boutique Rare. "They are not looking for the same item," she says, "they just want something from us."

Having jealously noted these benefits, menswear labels are starting to go after male artists. At the Grammys in late January, members of Kings of Leon appeared in Burberry and John Varvatos.

So who's the Oscars' Actor Most Likely to Sell Fashion—the guy with Ms. Bullock's combination of attractive looks and guy-next-door accessibility?

No, not Jeremy Renner, the sexy star of "The Hurt Locker." The street money's on Best Supporting Actor nominee Woody Harrelson.

Arbitrage

A Tiffany diamond solitaire ring

City	Currency	US$
New York		$16,100
Frankfurt	€11,800	$16,246
Manila	775,000 pesos	$16,717
Brussels	€12,200	$16,797
Hong Kong	HK$136,000	$17,506
London	£12,800	$20,077
Sydney*	A$23,700	$20,769
Paris	€15,205	$20,934
Rome	€16,085	$22,146
Tokyo	¥2.6 million	$29,200

*D-color

Note: A brilliant-cut, one-carat round diamond (VS1 clarity, E color) set in platinum

Prices, including taxes, converted to the nearest U.S. dollar

A Swedish smörgåsbord

The Stockholm Archipelago offers 30,000 islands of fun

By J.S. Marcus

Sandhamn, Sweden

Anders Anderson is in a good position to judge when to visit the Stockholm Archipelago: The economist bought his own small island in 2004. "I think winter is the best time," he says, invoking the iridescent sea and reflective snow cover. "You have light everywhere."

Others might prefer the summer and the 12 extra hours of daylight, but Stockholmers and a growing number of foreign visitors are finding the chain of 30,000 islands just as intriguing in winter, when saunas, ideal ice-skating, hiking and pervasive quiet more than make up for the unavoidable darkness.

With some islands just big enough to stand on and others nearly as large as the center of Stockholm, the archipelago was once a rough and remote home to farmers and fishermen. Long an inspiration to Swedish artists and writers, the area changed in the middle of the last century, when tens of thousands of ordinary Swedes began to summer here. Now, as expensive year-round homes replace seasonal shacks, Stockholmers are discovering the area's off-season pleasures and property values are skyrocketing.

For Mr. Anderson, a 43-year-old Stockholmer, the archipelago is full of ABBA memories. He's the son of Stig Anderson, the Swedish rock impresario and the music group's lyricist in its crucial early years, and he spent his childhood summers on Viggsö, a small island where many ABBA songs were composed. In cold winters like this one, he says, he takes a ferry to a nearby island called Grinda, and enjoys making the rest of the journey on foot.

ABBA fans closely associate the archipelago with Viggsö, where all four members of the group summered in the 1970s. "The first version of 'Dancing Queen,'" recalls Mr. Anderson, "was performed on a few pots" in the kitchen of his family's summer house.

There are no significant tides in the Stockholm Archipelago, and only the barren outer islands are exposed to rough sea winds. During a visit this January, the wooded hills above Sandhamn, a village harbor on the island of Sandön, shimmered white; days' worth of snowfall enveloped towering evergreen trees. With hardly a boat to disturb them, the calm waters between the nearby islands were like mirrors, and, once you left the village behind, you could hear only your own footsteps.

Sandhamn, about two hours from Stockholm by bus and a year-round ferry, is something like the East Hampton of Sweden, and to many Swedes a symbol of the area's recent makeover. Home to the Seglarhotellet, a 79-room year-round hotel and harborside spa, Sandhamn is also the perfect base to enjoy the islands' winter atmosphere. More cozy than luxurious, the hotel's hodgepodge of charming buildings, constructed around a century-old yacht club, includes a grand upstairs bar with views over the water. The hotel offers winter weekend spa packages starting at 2,245 Swedish kronor ($310) a person, a night (meals and spa treatments included), and some rooms have saunas. There are also suites and apartments.

(clockwise from top) WoodyStock/Alamy; Staffan Dahlström; Seglarhotellet

Getting around
Year-round ferries with terminals accessible by bus and commuter train reach most popular islands. Call the tourist office at ☎46-8-100-222; or visit the Web site at visitskargarden.se

Hotels
Seglarhotellet, ☎ 46-8-574-504-00; www.sandhamn.com.
Smådalarö Gård, ☎ 46-8-501-551-00; www.sjonaramoten.se/smadalaro

Sandhamn, like so many towns in the archipelago, has a literary connection—this one to the frequent summer visitor Stieg Larsson, the late author of the "Millennium" crime trilogy, which begins with "The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo." Mr. Larsson gave Mikael Blomkvist, one of the trilogy's main characters, a summer house in the village. A colleague, Stockholm-based journalist Kurdo Baksi, recalls that Mr. Larsson, who suffered from insomnia, would stay up all night in Sandhamn, working on all three books at once.

The writer most closely associated with the archipelago, the pioneer of modern drama August Strindberg, infuriated Kymmendo islanders after he "poorly disguised" them in a novel, says Erik Höök, senior curator at Stockholm's Strindberg Museum. Another Strindberg haunt, the resort of Dalarö, is reachable by commuter train from Stockholm and is a convenient place to get a taste of the archipelago. An excellent 62-room, year-round hotel—The Smådalarö Gård, situated around a restored 200-year-old manor house—offers winter weekend packages, with quayside sauna facilities, allowing for rapid cool-downs in the Baltic, as well as an outdoor Jacuzzi. The January-March packages are about $330 for two people (including some meals).

Clockwise from the top: Houses in Sandhamn; skaters at the Söderarm lighthouse on the island of Torskär, on the archipelago's northern edges; Seglarhotellet

Stockholm has had an especially cold winter this year, and on weekend winter mornings, archipelago ferries have been filled with day-tripping ice skaters. Armed with ski poles, used to test the stability of the ice, and with long-distance skates that strap onto hiking boots, the skaters usually plan their trips at the very last minute, says professional guide Ylva Schöldberg. She leads groups out to the archipelago during skating season, which lasts into early March. Conditions change, she says, even hour to hour, due in part to the salt in the water—which can cause the surface to melt. Falling through the ice is quite common, Ms. Schöldberg says, and her backpack, always filled with an entire change of clothes, also acts as a flotation device. (On the Web, friluftsframjandet.se offers information in Swedish on archipelago day-trips from Stockholm for experienced skaters.)

The cold will long outlast the darkness, as the winter daylight grows by around 30 minutes every week. In April comes the reopening of Oaxen Krog (oaxenkrog.se), the innovative restaurant on the small island of Oaxen, near the chain's southernmost edge. Amphibious plane and $130 taxi rides are favored ways to reach the eatery, a bastion of seasonal organic cuisine and the first Swedish restaurant to win a regular place on the S. Pellegrino World's 50 Best Restaurants List, sponsored by the mineral-water concern. A few years ago, Oaxen Krog's owners, chef Magnus Ek and his wife, Agneta Green, refitted an antique Dutch canal boat that now serves as one the archipelago's best hostelries.

After Christmas the restaurant shuts down, and the boat, which stays open as an inn, comes into Stockholm, but the pair don't entirely abandon the archipelago. Winter is one of the best times of the year on the islands, Mr. Ek said on a sunny January day in Stockholm's inner harbor. "The snow, the ice, the calmness," he said.

J.S. Marcus is a Berlin-based writer.

WHAT'S NEXT

By Alexandra A. Seno

Japan's Shigeru Ban has shaken up the world of architecture with innovations that include paper buildings to provide fast shelter after earthquakes—what lies ahead for his field?

In an age of mega-architectural firms that seek larger and larger projects, Mr. Ban has moved the other way. Rather than grow his practice to hundreds of designers, he's kept his staff to a manageable few dozen. And his company, Shigeru Ban Architects, which has offices in Tokyo, New York and Paris, works on a limited number of projects—each of which he has a hand in, be it a private home or an office building.

There are "too many big projects everywhere," says Mr. Ban, who is 52 years old. "The quality of projects is getting lower and lower. I am trying to be strict with myself so I don't get into that trap. Instead of making my practice bigger, I want to limit it to keep good quality on each project."

In May, his much-awaited Centre Pompidou-Metz, a new contemporary art museum in northeastern France, will open. The design, which Mr. Ban began six years ago, features a roof of woven steel and plywood, covered with a translucent lattice membrane.

Another in a series of articles pondering the shape of things to come

Mr. Ban first created temporary shelters in disaster zones from paper tubes in 1995, building short-term housing for earthquake survivors in Kobe, Japan. Since then, he has used tubes to build schools in Sichuan, China (after the earthquake there in 2008), and a music hall in L'Aquila, Italy (following an earthquake last year). Though he uses the tubes—in various thicknesses and diameters, round or square—primarily for interim structures, some stay up for years. Mr. Ban has employed tubes as load-bearing columns and even created arches with them. They can be made waterproof and fire-resistant, and with self-adhesive waterproof sponge tape applied to both sides, are quickly assembled.

The architect, who studied at the New York design school the Cooper Union, was recently in Hong Kong to inaugurate a paper-tube pavilion he created for the Hong Kong & Shenzhen Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism\Architecture in West Kowloon. This structure is truly temporary; it is permitted to stand only until the end of February, when the event closes.

From Tokyo, where he is based, Mr. Ban spoke with Weekend Journal Asia about his work, his interests and what he believes will define meaningful architecture in the future.

Samantha Sin for The Wall Street Journal

SHIGERU BAN

The architect in West Kowloon standing underneath the paper-tube pavilion he created for the Hong Kong & Shenzhen Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism\Architecture.

What materials are you interested in at the moment?

I'm very interested in conventional materials like concrete, steel, wood. I try to use the most appropriate material for a particular project.

What is the concept of the new Centre Pompidou-Metz?

After the success of the Guggenheim in Bilbao [Spain], people have been talking about the so-called "Bilbao Effect," the effect of a sculptural building helping a small town. I wanted to design a museum that is monumental but also functional as a museum.

What is the challenge in achieving that?

Many museums are very sculptural, monumental and normal [but] people have never been in because they think modern art is a bit difficult to understand....The museum is almost screening people and only admitting people who think they understand contemporary art. I think the museum has to be more welcoming of people who may not be interested in art.

How do you solve this problem?

I think a museum should be a gathering place. The exhibition should be seen in the public area so that they may be interested in coming into the galleries. I first asked the landscape architect [of Centre Pompidou-Metz] to design the garden. Then I put a big roof on top. The inside space is an extension of the exterior. That is the idea, based on a Chinese traditional bamboo hat.

Where did you find this hat?

In Paris, in an antique shop. I found it almost 10 years ago. I thought it was very architectonic.

What do you do for fun?

I like reading [Japanese] historical stories. It has nothing to do with my work.

What kind of music do you like?

I like classic, jazz. When I was in New York as a student I was always listening to jazz.

What performers do you like?

When I was a student I liked Michael Franks. I still listen to music but I'm not collecting CDs anymore. Now I listen to the radio.

How do you work?

I work anywhere. I make many sketches on a train or airplane.

Why do you take on so many humanitarian projects?

Sometimes working for the privileged makes me tired because they are very demanding. I'm now working in Italy where there was an earthquake. The orchestra has nowhere to play so I decided to make a temporary concert hall.

Is it better to work on big or small projects?

Many of the architects I respect in the 20th century—[Alvar] Aalto, [Mies] Van der Rohe, [Louis] Kahn, Frank Lloyd Wright—they kept designing houses until they died. Now many big architects after they start designing buildings, stop designing houses because it not interesting commercially. The effort is so big but the profit is so small.

Designing office buildings is much easier than a house. You design for an average. But for a house, it is a particular request for each client and there is no repetition of rooms.

What's next for architecture?

Historically, architects worked for privileged people, religious groups, noblemen. Now architects are working for big corporations, governments, rich people trying to display their power and money by monumental architecture. It is the same.

What would you like to see happen in your field?

When people lose their houses after an earthquake we don't see architects there because they are too busy working for the privileged. I think we have to include them in working in disaster areas. Also, we [architects] are responsible for disasters. After an earthquake, when a building collapses and people are killed, it is not because of earthquake itself but because of the structure of the building. That is the responsibility of an architect.

Alexandra A. Seno is a writer based in Hong Kong.

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▶ To see a video of Shigeru Ban, click on **Asia.WSJ.com**.

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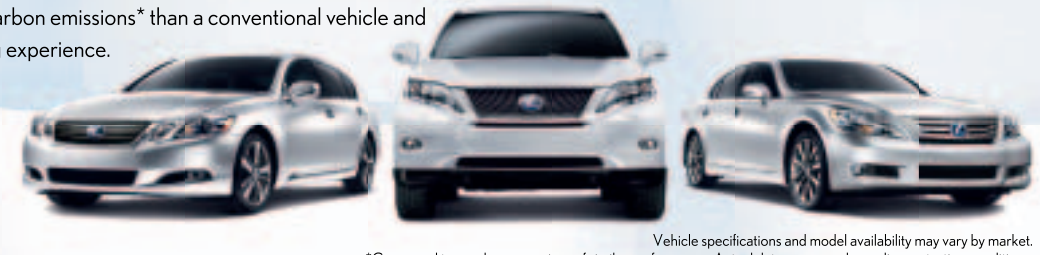

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Myanmar memories

The threat to a cache of colonial treasures

By a Wall Street Journal reporter

Yangon

The colonial buildings of this once-grand city are scattered about like tombstones in a neglected cemetery—unnoticed, and often unwanted, relics of a lost era.

Yangon is home to one of the largest collections of undisturbed colonial architecture in the world, with some neighborhoods left almost exactly as they were when the country gained independence from Britain some 60 years ago. But the buildings, already crumbling after years of neglect under a repressive military regime, face an increasingly uncertain future.

A government decision to move Myanmar's capital from Yangon to a remote redoubt named Naypyitaw in 2005 has left several of the most important buildings almost totally abandoned, accelerating their deterioration. Meantime, resurgent investment from China and other Asian neighbors is triggering interest in development—including the possibility of building shopping malls and apartment blocks where old structures now stand.

Buildings at risk include Secretariat, one of Southeast Asia's most important modern historical sites. It was here that Aung San, Myanmar's main independence hero, and father of famed dissident Aung San Suu Kyi, was assassinated by political rivals in July 1947, setting off a series of events that culminated in a military takeover in 1962.

Although Secretariat, with its gaudy red-and-yellow exterior and turrets, was ridiculed by residents when it opened in 1905, it became a hive of government ministries and, ultimately, a regional landmark. Today, inhabited only by a few camped-out soldiers, the dilapidated structure is hidden from the public behind a forest of trees and chain-link fence. Photographing the building is prohibited. Some residents believe it is already beyond repair.

A couple of blocks away, the multistory Railway Headquarters (1896), also of bright red brick, was built with rows of ornate windows framed with filigreed railings and matching awnings. Today, the awnings are collapsing and some windows are bricked in, while others are covered in reed mats or sacks. Weeds grow from walls and spill over ledges. The grounds are littered with metal—scraps and what look like pieces of equipment—nearly hidden by brush and vines.

Preserving Yangon's historic buildings rates low among social priorities in Myanmar, which consistently ranks as one of the poorest and most-corrupt nations in the world. The government is accused of widespread human-rights abuses, including the imprisonment of political opponents such as Ms. Suu Kyi. Some foreigners refuse on principle to visit Myanmar, which is open to tourists, because of the regime's track record.

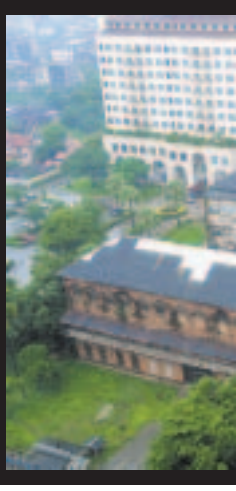
Still, historians are hopeful that at least some of Yangon's buildings will be preserved.

"It's very hard to go around what was once the British Empire and see so many buildings intact," says Ian Morley, an urban historian at the Chinese University of Hong Kong who calls the city's center possibly "the last example of a colonial core" still intact in Asia.

"I don't mean to come off as a raving colonialist," he says. But "we need to be aware of where we come from," and the threats upon Yangon's surviving buildings "are very, very great."

Myanmar's recent repressive history is one of the main reasons its colonial buildings are still standing. The military restricted access to the outside world after it came to power nearly 50 years ago, and in more recent years, U.S. and European sanctions prevented many Western companies from investing there. As a result, Yangon never went through the frenzied development that remade Bangkok, Beijing and other Asian cities.

New development is still minimal. But parts of Myanmar's economy have picked up in recent years, spurring construction. Trade between China and Myanmar quadrupled in recent years, reaching more than $2.6 billion in 2008. While much of that money is being spent in other parts of the country, a handful of new apartment blocks have popped up around Yangon or are under construction. Crews are finishing work on a



From left, this 1910 building, once home to the Rowe & Co. department store, is now in disrepair as an immigration office; the British Railway Headquarters, from 1896, is fenced off and surrounded by weeds and junk; this monastery, likely once a private home, shows the effects of years of attack by sun and rain; the Strand Hotel, built in 1901 by the famed Sarkies brothers—whose other properties included Singapore's Raffles Hotel—was rescued from rat-infested decay by a 1993 renovation.

Secretariat, a government office building dating from 1905, is considered one of the most important modern historical sites in Southeast Asia; the 1947 assassination of independence hero Aung San, father of Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, was carried out here.

Trip planner

The best time to visit is November to February, when temperatures fall and the rain eases. Visas for most nationalities must be obtained in advance. Travelers should carry cash—clean, crisp U.S. dollars—because ATMs are not available and credit cards are generally accepted only by a few top hotels.

GETTING THERE

Most flights connect via Southeast Asian hubs, including Bangkok, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. Carriers include Thai Airways, Air Asia, Malaysia Airlines and Silk Air.

WHERE TO STAY

Prices are for one night in the high season.

The Strand (92 Strand Rd.; ☎ 95-1-243-377; www.ghmhotels.com), at $240 to $700, is a luxurious time capsule with wicker furniture and teak floors, conveniently located.

The Governor's Residence ▲ (35 Taw Win Rd.; ☎ 95-1-229-860; www.governorsresidence.com), from $200, in a restored 1920s mansion; not within walking distance of central Yangon.

Traders Hotel (223 Sule Pagoda Rd.; ☎ 95-1-242-828; www.shangri-la.com), starting at about $90, is in a charmless high-rise—but good value and location.

The Savoy hotel (129 Dhammazedi Rd.; ☎ 95-1-526-289; www.savoy-myanmar.com), from about $130, offers value, though it's a bit outside central downtown.

WHAT TO DO

Start your walk at Sule Pagoda in the center of downtown, and head east past City Hall, the former Rowe & Co. building and Yangon's High Court. A right on Pansodan Street leads into the original financial center—imposing bank and insurance buildings, including one that houses a Yangon art gallery, Lokanat. After a refreshment stop at the Strand, continue west past the old customs house and then head north to Mahabandoola Garden and back to Sule Pagoda.

The British Railway Headquarters and Secretariat, both closed to the public, require slightly more walking. For more information, pick up the map "Historical Walks in Yangon," available at www.asiabooks.com.

WHERE TO EAT

The Strand and Governor's Residence both have lavish restaurants and bars that seem plucked from a W. Somerset Maugham short story. Monsoon (85-87 Thinbyu Rd.; ☎ 951-295-224; www.monsoonmyanmar.com) offers dishes from across Southeast Asia, including Myanmar.

From the top, Mahabandoola Garden fronts the 1911 High Court, still in use and in relatively good condition, landmark clock tower included; while outsiders may feel a romantic attachment to the old buildings of Yangon, for many locals who actually have to live with them, they are inconvenient, unsafe eyesores, with their jury-rigged, unreliable wiring and crumbling facades—not to mention buckling staircases and rotting beams.

tower of 20 stories or more in the center of downtown that was started, but left unfinished, years ago.

"You'll probably see a lot more apartments," says Brian Agland, Myanmar country director for the international relief agency CARE in Yangon. As for the older buildings, "you're starting to see a lot more decay" as the government spends more time in Naypyitaw.

Myanmar officials have made promises in the past to preserve Yangon's colonial remains. The regime established a list of protected "heritage" sites in the late 1990s that grew to include roughly 200 buildings, including Secretariat as well as churches, schools and residences—largely in recognition of their potential as tourist draws. Local residents, though, say the government has for the most part ignored its list, sprucing up a few buildings while leaving most others to rot.

During a recent visit, residents pointed to a block they said was supposed to be protected but now is surrounded by fences and signs promoting a future shopping mall. When asked about the site, a resident said she was told the historic buildings there were "accidentally damaged" and therefore no longer subject to protection.

Attempts to contact Myanmar authorities over several weeks to discuss their plans for Yangon's buildings were unsuccessful. The regime rarely speaks to foreign journalists.

Architectural historians who have studied the city say that lower-level government employees have expressed enthusiasm for working with outsiders to save the buildings, but calls to more senior officials typically go unanswered. Even basic information—such as when structures were built—is difficult to obtain. In some cases, records were destroyed.

Myanmar's government has "pretty much villainized the buildings as colonial eyesores, as hateful reminders of the past," says one academic who has researched Yangon's architecture and, like many experts on the country, requests anonymity when discussing the regime.

Some Yangon residents say they believe the government truly does want to renovate the buildings, preferably with help from foreign investors, turning them into hotels or other businesses. But Myanmar's tourism industry has struggled in recent years. And many of the buildings are in such disrepair that they would be far cheaper to rip down than rebuild. Some are empty, roofless shells, home to buckling staircases and sprouting trees. Open sewers feed into some courtyards.

It's also hard, if not impossible, to persuade locals to restore buildings on their own, in part because they lack financing in Myanmar's cash-starved economy. Plus, some residents view the buildings as uncomfortable eyesores and prefer the advantages of newer buildings with modern amenities.

The preservationists who do follow the buildings have focused their energies on publicizing them to foreign visitors in the hopes that international attention will spur Myanmar officials. Historians are also encouraging the many foreign institutions in Myanmar—especially international aid agencies—to take over and repair historic structures.

The group CARE, for instance, moved into a two-story, early-1900s house in Yangon's Embassy District two years ago and restored some of the interior and two damaged verandas. "I just thought it had potential," says Mr. Agland, the CARE country director. Now "we have big meetings out on the verandas."

Other buildings that have been saved include the Strand hotel, built in 1901 by Armenian brothers whose chain included the famous Raffles Hotel in Singapore. With teak-framed windows, tiled floors and vaulted ceilings, it was for many decades a required stop for wealthy European travelers in Asia. But by the 1970s, guests described a building filled with rats and bats, with faucets that issued murky brown water. Refurbished with the help of foreign investors in the early 1990s at a cost of several million dollars, it has since hosted the likes of Mick Jagger.

But such high-cost projects are risky. A Strand official says the hotel has barely broken even in recent years, since international sanctions were imposed. And while there's talk that Secretariat or the Railway Headquarters will be similarly restored with money from China or Singapore, few locals believe it will happen anytime soon, if ever.

Built on an early Buddhist pilgrimmage site near a hilltop shrine called Shwedagon, Yangon was little more than a small town until the mid-19th century. The British seized the area in the 1850s as Britain conquered what was known as Burma, and expanded the city—which they called Rangoon—to become a strategic river port.

Led by a superintendent who had worked on city planning in Singapore and an army engineer, Lieutenant A. Fraser, the British laid out the city on a grid and drained swampy areas. Population tripled to about 135,000 in the early 1880s, and by the early 1900s, Rangoon was one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the British Empire, with streetcars, gaslights and public gardens. It boomed further over the next several decades with exports of rice, teak and other goods.

In the city's heyday, engineers added entire neighborhoods of European-style buildings, blending Victorian architecture with more exotic flourishes from West Bengal and other parts of the empire. Wealthy traders built teak mansions topped with elaborate cupolas. Along Pansodan Street downtown, businessmen created a miniature version of lower Manhattan, with banks, insurance companies and trading houses graced by thick columns, pillars and arches. Later buildings incorporated Art Deco designs.

The Rowe & Co. department store (1910), for example, became known as one of the ritziest shopping centers in Southeast Asia, with its patterns of red and yellow brick, topped with a tower reminiscent of Philadelphia's Independence Hall. Although still used today—as an immigration office—many of the windows are knocked out or covered with tarps, and dark black stains cover the exterior.

Many of the grandiose British buildings confused or annoyed local residents. A famous local joke held that Rangoon's High Court (1911), with a clock tower rising above the nearby shophouses and plenty of the city's ubiquitous bright red brick, was designed by "a convict with a grudge against the judge." The building remains in relatively good shape, as it is still used for some court proceedings, and during a recent visit workers were seen repainting parts of the exterior.

In one case—the Rangoon City Hall (1936)—a Burmese architect (with Western training) was called in to make the building more suitable to local tastes. He visited the ancient city of Bagan and other sites around the country to study pagodas and monasteries, elements of which he added to the city-hall design. The cream-colored building includes Burmese spires and mannered Asian arches, creating a unique West-meets-East mix, like a British ministry doubling as a Buddhist temple.

Myanmar entered a period of tumult after independence in the 1940s, and new development came to a virtual standstill after the military took over. There was a brief flurry of new construction—including several high-rise towers—in the 1990s, when the junta liberalized Myanmar's economy to attract more foreign capital. But the mini-boom ended abruptly with the 1997 Asian financial crisis and tough economic sanctions from the U.S. and Europe.

It's still possible the recent increase in Asian investment in Myanmar could help save some of Yangon's buildings, if companies decide to make use of them. Some of the surge in foreign-aid money that followed Cyclone Nargis in 2008 went to fix up houses like the one CARE now uses.

For now, residents are skeptical. One bookshop owner in central Yangon says he doubts officials "will do their job" and protect buildings on the government's own heritage list. And without proper restoration, says another Yangon resident, "they will soon disappear."

WSJ.com

▶ To see a slideshow of old Yangon, click on **Asia.WSJ.com**.

A tale of two chefs

One heads a stately New York wine temple, the other a haut modern bistro

By Raymond Sokolov

New York

Here's a tale of two chefs, both top toques. Both of them once ran glamorous kitchens built to serve huge wine cellars that had been amassed privately by their restaurants' owners in previous careers.

Scott Bryan left the kitchen of Veritas, despite, or perhaps because of, boss Park B. Smith's 192,000-bottle collection, to open little elegant Apiary, where Manhattan's Third Avenue ebbs into the Bowery.

Todd Macdonald is now in his second stint at CRU, a subfusc vine temple on lower Fifth Avenue where he served as sous-chef before leaving a couple of years ago to work for a caterer. CRU offers diners the chance to troll among more than 150,000 labels in owner Roy Welland's cellar. It's impossible to say whether the shaky economy has damped the appeal of a dining experience whose prime claim to scarce dollars is a choice among, for example, several hundred Burgundies from the district of Gevrey-Chambertin alone. But I can stipulate that CRU was virtually empty on a recent evening, despite the wine list's many attractively priced wines and a skillful modern menu designed to pair flexibly with a wide range of them.

If CRU is a bit like a men's club secreted near raffish Eighth Street in Greenwich Village, Apiary is a triumph of clever French postmodern interior design dropped into a small space. Chef Bryan, who ran Veritas after stints at lofty Le Bernardin and Lespinasse, is a protégé of David Bouley, with a reputation for originality and ego. In less than a year, he's put a personal stamp on Apiary, which may lack the vinous depth of Veritas but takes a more drinker-friendly attitude toward its smaller cellar by offering three dozen open wines for tasting by the glass. All of Apiary's seats were full when four of us ate there earlier this year.

So, then, did the greater wieldiness of Apiary produce a better dinner than the wine-centered stateliness at CRU? Well, I'm going to produce a waffle as an answer. For me, it really boiled down to mood, expectation. As to cost, main courses at both places hovered between $25 and $30.

Certainly, it would be unfair to Mr. Macdonald to call his food dull or plain-faced. He can put a deft personal spin on a French classic such as *jambon persillade*, the farmhouse treatment of ham layered with parsley, for which you will find directions in Julia Child, but which Mr. Macdonald dresses up with tomato conserve, mustard seeds and country bread. Even his simple salad can be memorable, with a vinaigrette from port-like Banyuls wine, pistachios and brandied cherries lurking among the infant greens.

His imagination runs to the tweak rather than the wholesale assault on tradition. The menu changes, but when I last looked Mr. Macdonald was confidently garnishing his classics with coriander, mustard oil, salsify and mashed chickpeas. And it was a real service to be steered by the genial sommelier toward a Rhône red we wouldn't have picked on our own (J.L. Chave's Offerus 2006 for $75, about 2½ times retail).

At Apiary, you could also order a well-picked wine of significance for under $100 (and a slightly lower markup in the two examples I checked), but the aura is definitely haut bistro with a lightness of step. The lighting alone is worth the trip. The narrow, deep interior has been designed by the French giant Ligne Roset and stars barrel-shaped lamps with cutouts in their shades that flash images of old-fashioned chandeliers on the walls. This witty nod to antique grandeur, in a modern space, pairs well with the conservatively innovative food.

You could eat at Apiary for $35 if you chose the three-course fixed menu available Sunday through Thursday. It included two of the dishes our table liked best. The magical sunchoke velouté—a faux cream-of-mushroom soup based on Jerusalem artichokes, pickled mushrooms, black-truffle butter and croutons—was one of those culinary inventions that makes chefolatry seem worth the worship. Although more traditional, the financier, a circular moist almond-based cake festooned with blackberries, made the leap from forgotten pages in the pastry literature to our plates with the grace of an elderly relative as spry as anyone else in the family.

Much of the menu at Apiary does not rise above what might be called better bistro—in concept, that is. But the first-rate execution makes roasted chicken, the confit of duck leg and the vanilla panna cotta with raspberry sauce worth ordering. I will be back for the squid-ink linguine with shellfish, chili flakes and basil.

Indeed, I am already wanting more of the mac and cheese with orzo, the barley-shaped pasta, substituted for elbow macaroni—an elegant variation on the currently voguish nursery classic. Just the sort of turn on a cliché that you'd hope for in the perfect neighborhood restaurant.

Apiary may not be that yet, but my hunch is that it is a harbinger of many other restaurants where gifted chefs may soon be taking refuge from the vanishing glory days of kitchens with teams of apprentices sticking fussy decorations on over-handled food with tiny tweezers.

Rebecca McAlpin for The Wall Street Journal

The restaurants

Apiary
60 Third Ave.
☎ 1-212-254-0888
Web: www.apiarynyc.com

CRU
24 Fifth Ave.
☎ 1-212-529-1700
Web: www.cru-nyc.com

Clockwise from top left: The main dining room at Apiary; spice-crusted leg of lamb at CRU; Todd Macdonald in the kitchen at CRU; CRU's exterior; two dishes at Apiary—a French cake called a financier and a confit of duck leg

Redsports.sg

Clockwise from above, Thailand Tigers center Ikenna Nwankwo; battling for a rebound with Singapore's Michael LeBlanc as fellow American Chazz Briggs stands by; one of the team's Thai starters, guard Attaporn Lertmalaiporn

Long Shot

The new Asean Basketball League tries to win over the Thais

By John Krich

Bangkok

The stands of this city-center arena, capacity 6,000, remain nearly empty at tip-off, even though admission is free. So are the single mimeographed sheets that serve as programs. That might leave fans money for a beverage, but the rented venue, owned by the government Bureau of Sports Science, doesn't allow sales of beer. Or soft drinks. Or food.

Of the few hundred in attendance, only a dozen excitable Asian youths and a brace of African-Americans badly homesick for basketball respond to the cheerleaders' pregame pleas for some noise. The eight-member squad seems underage—several sport braces on their teeth—as well as under-rehearsed.

Once the game starts, a band high in the stands drowns out the squeak of sneakers and the thump of dribbling with drumbeats, punctuating drives to the hoop that too often end with the ball clattering off the rim. The home team's excitable, bald-domed owner—a Dutch concert manager who first came to Asia while working for the late American soul singer James Brown—paces behind his bench to urge on his improbable squad. The experienced American coach he hired just months ago, Chuck Davisson, has already been replaced by assistant coach Soonthornpong Mawinthorn.

The biggest name on the roster is a Nigerian-American giant whose claim to fame is a place on the bench at UCLA, the U.S. college-basketball powerhouse, the last time it won a national championship. That was 1995. Since he graduated two years later, Ikenna "Ike" Nwankwo has bounced around leagues in 16 countries. Two of the guards are Thai twin brothers, Darongpan and Darunpong Apiromvilaichai—alike in their blond-dyed shag haircuts and tendency to throw errant passes, further confused by their jersey numbers: 69 and 96, respectively.

Sports has always had its share of lovable long shots, plucky underdogs that fans pull for despite the odds, or even because of them. Now there's the Thailand Tigers—one of six franchises of the Asean Basketball League, currently in the final weeks of its inaugural season. (The other five teams are the Philippine Patriots, the Singapore Slingers, the Satria Muda BritAma—from North Jakarta—the Kuala Lumpur Dragons and the opponent on this Sunday afternoon last month, the Brunei Barracudas.)

The league is backed by the big money and marketing savvy of founder Tony Fernandes, chief executive of budget carrier Air Asia, but it's clear that the Tigers' attempt to create a mass fan base is going to be no slam dunk.

"After all, this is the first entirely professional sports franchise in the history of Thailand," proudly declares the Tigers' 47-year-old owner, Wim Reijnen, adding that even the Thai soccer league has been semipro—that is, with rosters that mix pros and amateurs. He doesn't care to divulge, though, just how much his players are paid.

A basketball aficionado since fellow Dutchman Rik Smits made it to the National Basketball Association in the U.S. in 1988, Mr. Reijnen says he's long wanted to turn his performer-management experience to the realm of sports. In addition to picking the team name and colors and hiring and firing his first coach, he's learned to cheer from the team bench "just like Mark Cuban"—the owner of the NBA Dallas Mavericks, who is known for his brash behavior and emotional outbursts.

"It will take time, three seasons or so to establish," Mr. Reijnen says of the new, Malaysia-headquartered league.

League CEO Kuhan Foo, a former Air Asia executive, says the idea grew out of meetings at the Beijing Olympics and that, for now, Mr. Fernandes remains the prime funder (along with wealthy team owners like broadcasting magnate Antonio Cojuangco of the Patriots). The league has the blessing of the International Basketball Federation, the official supervising body of world basketball, since the short schedule doesn't conflict with existing tournaments or competitions.

Plans are to lengthen the season next autumn, and to add teams—one more each from the Philippines and Indonesia, long the region's hotbeds of basketball interest. (The PBA, or Philippine Basketball Association, has been going strong for 34 years, and boasts some of the world's most colorful team names, including the Rain or Shine Elasto Painters, the Pure Foods Tender Juicy Giants and the Barako Bull Energy Boosters.) For the future, the league is eyeing promising markets such as Vietnam.

Mr. Foo argues that the demographics are better for basketball than for soccer, "attracting more affluent young people and women." So far, league games have averaged 1,500 attendance, pulled up by a strong showing in Brunei, where the lack of competing entertainment has helped make the franchise a surprise hit. The league also boasts an ESPN Star Sports broadcast contract in Asia.

But in Thailand, sports fans are more in the habit of using cable TV to follow the exploits of international leagues, like the NBA or soccer's English Premier League, than coming out to support a local product. Since each franchise is allowed only four imports, including two from other Asean countries (usually more-skilled Filipinos), most of the Tigers' roster comes from a national squad that is short in size and short on experience. "The core of a few of our opponents' team have been together for years in the Philippine and Indonesia league," concedes Mr. Reijnen.

"It's hard to find any basketball courts in the Thai countryside," says American Ben Tamte, a hoops aficionado who teaches in Thailand. "And when you do, the nets are missing or they are using the court for futsal." (Futsal is a smaller-scale version of soccer.)

"What [the Tigers] need is their own Thai superstar," says Mr. Nwankwo, the thoughtful Nigerian-American center who's had several unsuccessful tryouts with NBA teams while bouncing around leagues from here to Saudi Arabia. He and teammate Chaz Briggs—an American who played for West Virginia University from 2001 to 2003—were teammates in Holland last year as well, and never expected to move to Asia. "But all the cities, the facilities are much more modern than we expected," says Mr. Nwankwo. "And we both go for spicy Thai food."

Owner Mr. Reijnen admits he's frustrated that he can't yet add snacks—and atmosphere—to the stadium setting, but claims he has received excellent government support. The crowd does wake up a bit as the Tigers, who came into this game in last place with a 3-10 won-lost record, rally remarkably from 13 points down against the quicker, more assured Barracudas.

American Jerome Banks, a 38-year-old math teacher at the International School of Bangkok who doesn't miss a Tigers game, has brought along several friends to introduce them to the local product. The newfound Tigers' fanatics urge on the home team—especially promising starters Ricky Ricafuente and Attaporn Lertmalaiporn—with little more Thai than basic numbers. "Way to go, *ha sip ha* (fifty-five)!" they shout. "Come on, *yi sip sam* (twenty-three)!"

But the Tigers ultimately dribble away their one-point edge in the game's last sloppy moments, to lose by five. (They will end the season at 3-12, missing the four-team playoffs leading to a Feb. 28 championship game; Brunei's Barracudas, ending at 6-9, will be the other team not participating.)

Still, Tigers' owner Mr. Reijnen remains optimistic about the league and his underdog effort. "With more youth-development projects, basketball can only grow," he says. "I think the nonstop action of an indoor sport where you sit in air-conditioning appeals to the people here. And now every young player in the country has a goal to shoot for"—in becoming a professional basketball player.

John Krich is a writer based in Bangkok.

Golf's populist pitch

Stung by elitist image, game emphasizes charitable, job-creating sides

A year ago this month, you may recall, the celebrity Web site TMZ blew the lid off a golf-related scandal—or so it thought. Under the headline "Bailout Bank Blows Millions Partying in L.A.," it breathlessly revealed that Northern Trust, despite having accepted $1.6 billion in U.S. government Troubled Asset Relief Program funds three months earlier, was entertaining clients at the PGA Tour event it sponsors, the Northern Trust Open. Within hours, pundits from Bill O'Reilly of Fox News to Maureen Dowd of the New York Times were decrying such excess, particularly a party at which Sheryl Crow sang, in a time of financial crisis. Members of Congress released letters demanding

Golf Journal
JOHN PAUL NEWPORT

recourse. Golf in general took a hit.

The Northern Trust Open returned last week in Los Angeles, and guess what? Advance ticket sales were up 35% and hospitality sales—those big tents used for corporate entertaining—were up 50%. No live music this year, to be more "in alignment with the economic climate," says a Northern Trust spokesman, but the golf wasn't bad: Steve Stricker held off a final-round challenge to win and move up to No. 2 in the world, displacing Phil Mickelson, who tied for 45th.

"Some of the maelstrom around the tournament actually helped it grow," said Kelly Mannard, Northern Trust's chief marketing officer. "People read the headlines and said, 'Oh, that's terrible,' but when they peeled back the layers of the onion and started asking the right questions, they saw how this thing benefits business and how it benefits the community." The company attracted "millions of dollars" in new business as a result of last year's event—partly because the flap called attention to the fact that the bank was fundamentally sound, Ms. Mannard said. The tournament couldn't accommodate all the ticket requests it received from clients wanting to attend this year. (Northern Trust repaid the TARP loan last summer, providing taxpayers a profit of $133 million. The company maintained it never needed the funding but took it as a favor to regulators to help raise overall confidence in the program.)

The Northern Trust Open's mini-resurgence in a still-dicey economic environment may be something of a special case. Three other financial-industry sponsors of PGA Tour events, Morgan Stanley, Merrill Lynch and Wells Fargo (which acquired a title sponsor, Wachovia), are downplaying their involvement with the tournaments; a fourth, U.S. Bank, failed to renew its sponsorship of a tournament in Milwaukee. After General Motors declared bankruptcy, Buick last summer ended its PGA sponsorships after 50 years. But Northern Trust's clients, primarily high-net-worth individuals, would presumably not be the types to be dissuaded from enjoying a golf tournament by populist ranting about the game's supposed elitist values. There is also the matter of Jerry West, the former Los Angeles Lakers star, now 71 but still a local hero, who agreed last spring to become the event's executive director. By all accounts his energetic efforts, including a recent publicity stunt hitting wedge shots through one of the O's in the famous Hollywood sign, have been effective.

But Mr. West's involvement speaks directly to an argument that both the PGA Tour and the broader golf industry have been making recently in their battle to counter the game's perception problem: the positive economic impact golf has on local communities. Mr. West's oft-stated motivation for taking the gig, and working as hard at it as he has, is to boost the money it raises for Los Angeles charities. The tournament historically has channeled more than $1 million each year to Southern California philanthropies, but it has underperformed tournaments in other cities; Dallas last year raised $4.4 million. Mr. West wants to change that.

Last month at the PGA Merchandise Show in Florida, a coalition of golf organizations opened another front in the perception wars. "We Are Golf" represents club pros, course superintendents, course owners and club managers, and aims to convince policy makers in Washington that

John Kuczala (photo illustration); Getty Images/AFP (2)

Steve Stricker, right, won the Northern Trust Open; Jerry West, above, worked to make it a winner for local charities.

golf is an important, job-creating industry. "Right now, it's considered politically risky to raise your hand in Washington and say that you support the golf industry," said Joe Steranka, chief executive of the PGA of America, one of the coalition partners.

Golf's politically toxic status has been a long time in the making. The low point, Mr. Steranka said, may have come during the Jack Abramoff lobbying scandals five years ago, with widespread reports of lavish, mostly free golf trips to Scotland arranged for members of Congress and staffers by the subsequently convicted Mr. Abramoff. The bad vibes surrounding the Northern Trust Open last year revived the negative image. "Emotions were running high because of the economic situation. In the heat of the moment, statements were made that brought back old stereotypes of golf as an elitist undertaking, but nothing could be farther from the truth," said Mr. Steranka. Among the figures golf leaders like to trot out is that 70% of rounds played in the U.S. are on public courses and that the median cost a round in 2008 was $28.

But the We Are Golf initiative's central point is that golf is responsible for roughly two million U.S. jobs, paying $61 billion in wages. Most of those jobs are working-class. PGA-certified professionals at golf courses may make close to $100,000, Mr. Steranka said, but the 40 or so other employees at a typical course—maintenance workers, shop assistants, cooks and waitresses—earn much less. There are the local small businesses that provide goods and services to golf courses; and painters and plumbers, beer-truck drivers, florists, vending machine operators, golf-cart repairmen.

The golf industry first realized it had a political problem in 2005 when, after Hurricane Katrina devastated the gulf coast, golf courses were lumped with massage parlors and casinos as businesses explicitly prohibited from receiving disaster-relief funds. Golf's power elite, led by PGA Tour Commissioner Tim Finchem, converged on Washington in April 2008 for the first National Golf Day, to lobby for better treatment. But the stimulus bill passed with most of the same exclusions for golf that the Katrina bill had.

"There are many members of Congress who absolutely love golf, but as of today, the industry lacks a bench of champions," said David Marin, a principal at the Podesta Group in Washington that We Are Golf has hired to make its case. Mr. Marin said the strategy will focus on "changing the narrative" about golf by introducing new storytellers: men and women whose jobs depend on the game even if they don't play.

"Golf needs a seat at the table when legislation that affects it is considered," Mr. Marin said, particularly measures concerning small-business taxes, labor policy, the environment and trademarks. "But for the time being we're playing defense."

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FILM

Channing Tatum and Amanda Seyfried in 'Dear John'

Sony Pictures

Lost in the mail

'Dear John' drags as the lovers' letters fly

By Joe Morgenstern

What happens when a genuinely dear John gets a Dear John letter? For the answer, just meander—no need for running or walking—to your local multiplex. That's where "Dear John," based on the Nicholas Sparks novel of the same name, will be meandering on its downward path from sweetly tender to terminally turgid.

The story begins in the spring of 2001, when a hunky boy meets a golden girl on a picturesque pier sticking out from the South Carolina coast into the Atlantic Ocean. His name is—exactly right!—and he's played by the model-turned-actor Channing Tatum. Her name is Savannah—though she comes from Charleston—and Amanda Seyfried plays her as a perfect empath; Savannah reacts with love and understanding to the tiniest twitch of the muscles on his handsome face.

This is good, because John, a special-forces soldier home on leave, is not what you'd call voluble. In the Nicholas Sparks tradition, he's an old-fashioned American archetype: strong and silent, and combative only in self-defense. But that's good too, because the director, Lasse Hallström, working from a screenplay by Jamie Linden, treats the lovers' first encounters in an enjoyably old-fashioned way, with palpable affection and not a trace of irony. It's as if these scenes had been lifted from a World War II love story. He must go back to his unit, she must go back to school and they both must be patient until his tour of duty ends in only a year.

But 9/11 intervenes, John responds to the terrorist attacks by re-enlisting, and their love must now be sustained by mail. This is good and not so good. The downside is obvious. Epistolary romance in the movies means listening to letters in voice-over, rather than studying live flesh in close-up. The upside is Mr. Sparks's abiding belief in the power of the written word—he wrote "The Notebook," which made a really fine movie, as well as "Message in a Bottle." This film goes so far as to explain, in a helpful montage set almost a decade ago, exactly how snail mail works: You put your envelope in a mailbox—or give it to a fellow soldier—the envelope goes to a post office, a machine sorts it and then sends it on its way to the addressee.

What's not good at all is how the story loses energy and interest when Savannah is off screen and John is slogging his way through several low-rent combat sequences. They get together again, of course; Mr. Sparks is a specialist in poignant reunions. But John's prolonged absence has made the course of true love disagreeably bumpy, and the perplexities of the hero and heroine are compounded by the limitations of the performances. Though Ms. Seyfried is a lovely actress, her inexperience shows in her climactic scenes, which aren't written very well to begin with, while Mr. Tatum's stolid reserve decays into dull passivity. A wealth of experience allows Richard Jenkins to transcend the limitations of his role as John's severely repressed but loving father, an obsessive coin collector who manifests symptoms of Asperger's Syndrome.

> The course of true love runs right over some terrrorists.

He's not alone in his struggle to prevail over adversity. Other characters must deal with autism and lymphoma in a movie that suffers from Convenient Disease Syndrome.

Illuminating Her Way

By Gerrie Lim

When Jennifer Thym put up $50,000 from her own savings to fund her first film project, her Chinese-American parents reacted with horror. It was bad enough that their daughter had given up a career in finance, now her new passion for directing was becoming a money pit. But she was not deterred: "I wanted to do it to prove some things to myself and to evolve."

A director charts an unusual course from the world of finance to Hong Kong cinema.

Ms. Thym's quest to become a filmmaker has been unconventional from start to finish. Arriving in Hong Kong in February 2007, she had no experience in the field, but she quickly dove into online courses, and then found a job as a line producer on a short film. Her first production, a 65-minute fantasy/suspense series called "Lumina," was shot in 12 days and debuted last September.

Moreover, the director's business model is as innovative as her resume. Ms. Thym put the entire nine-episode series on the Web for free, bypassing traditional distribution in hopes that its popularity would reap future DVD sales and lure investors for a sequel series. In the process she is demonstrating how new technology is lowering the barriers to entry for would-be auteurs.

Ms. Thym was born in New York and grew up in Chesterfield, Virginia, where she started out as a real estate lawyer before embarking on a finance career in Europe. After stints with banks in London and Vienna, she landed at a hedge fund. "I was there six months," she shrugs. "It wasn't for me. By that time, I was already realizing that I wanted to go into more of a creative field."

Nevertheless, a finance background comes in very handy, even in the film world. As Ms. Thym has found, "If you understand the business end of things, you can retain greater control over the creative side." It also helps to keep costs low. On "Lumina," made under the auspices of Ms. Thym's company RockGinger, her cinematographers Han Xiaosu and Andreas Thalhammer used a high-definition digital Red One camera, and cast and crew agreed to work for low wages. "From HK$500 to HK$700 a day," she reveals. "Not very much, but it adds up. There are no unions here, which makes a difference."

The series follows a young woman in Hong Kong (Lumina, played by Juju Chan Yuk-wan), as she becomes intrigued by a young man (Ryder, played by Michael Chan) whom she sees only inside mirrors. The viewer is drawn into allegories about the role of memory and reflection in life. "There's this sense of 'There could be somebody waiting for me, just right across a piece of glass,'" Ms. Thym explains.

The director acknowledges there are also some parallels with the popular "Twilight" movies. "I originally pitched it to Juju as a two-hour vampire movie. We actually have quite an overlap with the 'Twilight' fan base, since that's really a romance novel packaged as vampire story. A lot of the women—mostly 13 to 25, the 'Twilight' audience—said they liked Michael."

The series aims to explode the chop-socky Hong Kong stereotypes. "I was trying to do something between a comic book and a traditional film," Ms. Thym explains. But the second series will be slightly more conventional:

Elden Cheung

Jennifer Thym

"I've written treatments for five episodes at 22 minutes each, crossing over to what you might see on television. People are now getting used to seeing longer-form narratives online, and I think that's the future of where this is going."

Ms. Thym is also shooting another project, an action film entitled "Bloodtraffic," this month. "What I'm doing is a reaction to the recession," she believes. "A lot of independent studios right now are having trouble. When things are going well, you can spend money left and right and nobody would care, but now you've got to have really good stories and a really good distribution platform and a really great connection with your audience. The funny thing about a recession is that it forces people to be more creative, and that's good for this industry."

Should her film ventures fail, would Ms. Thym retreat to the world of finance? "Failure is relative," she sidesteps. "We didn't spend a lot of money so we didn't need to earn a lot of money to make our money back. But is making your money back the benchmark?"

Perhaps it is her parents' benchmark? "They now accept it and are proud that I actually made something," Ms. Thym laughs, "instead of only talking about it."

Mr. Lim is a Hong Kong-based free-lance writer.

Bookshelf / *By Sadanand Dhume*

Rediscovering a Forgotten Time in an Invisible Country

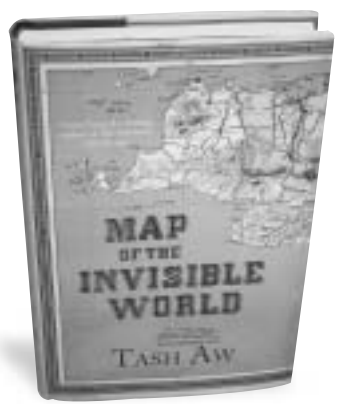
If there's such a thing as an invisible country, then the world's largest one is surely Indonesia. Only China, India and the United States have more people, yet Indonesia remains largely absent from discussions about the ballyhooed rise of Asia. Books about the archipelago accessible to a non-Indonesian reader are few and far between. In fiction, the must-read list barely extends beyond Christopher Koch's "The Year of Living Dangerously" and the works of the late Pramoedya Ananta Toer.

Map of the Invisible World
By Tash Aw
(Spiegel & Grau, 318 pages, $25)

Into this void steps Malaysian writer Tash Aw, whose 2005 debut novel, "The Harmony Silk Factory," won the prestigious Whitbread prize and was shortlisted for a slew of other awards. "Map of the Invisible World" tells the story of Adam de Willigen, a 16-year-old ethnic Indonesian orphan separated from his father, a Dutch painter and naturalized Indonesian citizen arrested amidst the political turmoil of 1964, President Sukarno's final year in office. Adam's search for his adopted father leads him from the Moluccas, the spice islands of lore, to a Jakarta seething with assassination plots, conspiracy theories and half-baked revolutionary rhetoric.

The teenager's quest is aided by another displaced Westerner, Margaret Bates, an American anthropologist with an interest in Papua and a childhood spent partly in bohemian Bali. But first Adam must avoid being duped by Maluddin Saidi, or Din, a surly Sumatran academic whose Dutch education has given him an ax to grind against the West, and whose shame about his poor and rudderless country fuels dreams of violently overthrowing Sukarno. To add to this emotionally volatile mix, Adam has vague but recurring memories of an older brother, Johan, who was whisked away from their orphanage by a wealthy Malaysian couple. While Adam negotiates turbulent political rallies and the hothouse culture of Jakarta student politics in search of his father, his guilt-wracked brother spends his days consorting with streetwalkers, experimenting with drugs, and abusing his father's Mercedes Benz.

In some ways, Mr. Aw mines a landscape of identity and belonging similar to that of his first novel. In "The Harmony Silk Factory" the central protagonist was Johnny Lim, a tough ethnic Chinese businessman-gangster in a Malay-majority country. Here it's an Indonesian boy with a Dutch name surrounded by a collection of expatriates whose loyalties—political as well as cultural—appear to lie with their adopted home. Events in both books unfold on the cusp of defining historical moments: the Japanese invasion of British Malaya in 1941-42, and Indonesia's anti-communist pogroms of 1965-66, which killed about 500,000 people and turned the country from a pro-Beijing economic basket case to a would-be Asian tiger and mainstay of the Western-oriented Association of Southeast Asian Nations.



Indeed, the mood in Indonesia's capital is central to the book. Sukarno's Jakarta is a city where Padang restaurant owners mix rice with maize to make it more affordable. Phone lines, for those lucky enough to own one, are down at least as often as they're up. Cars are cannibalized for spare parts. The price of a pack of Lucky Strikes soars. Against this backdrop of mismanagement and want, the president can only promise the uncertain pleasures of permanent revolution. This is the period when Sukarno famously told the U.S. to "Go to hell with your aid," sent Indonesian paratroopers to Malaysia out of pique over that country's independence, and presided over a mob's burning of the British embassy.

For the most part, Mr. Taw's prose style is uncluttered and to the point. At times, though, he reaches for the lyrical phrase or the apt observation. Indonesia is described as "this country of islands strung out across the sea like seaweed on the shore." For Margaret, the somewhat jaded anthropologist, "the tide [of love] had retreated, leaving broken bottles and driftwood and tangled nets." The swiftness of daybreak over Jakarta is "ruthless and efficient and unsentimental—typically Asian." The smell of a strange pillow can be "at once a lullaby and a stimulant." The angry young Sumatran Din likes only one thing about Westerners: that they "commemorate bad things that happened to them."

Unfortunately, a finely wrought sentence here and there doesn't quite make up for some of the novel's flaws. Mr. Aw's research is comprehensive, but its usage is far from seamless. At times the backdrop appears jerkily constructed from newspaper clippings and black and white newsreels rather than meshing naturally with the lives of the characters. The characters too, with the exception of Din and perhaps Margaret, lack a certain flesh-and-bloodness. With Johnny Lim in World War Two-era Malaysia, Mr. Aw was on firm ground. Here, exploring an all but forgotten time in an invisible land, he stumbles.

When it finally arrives, the great Indonesian novel in English will likely be written not by an outsider, but by a native who can venture confidently into the territory of emotion usually barred to journalists and historians. Mr. Aw and the gifted Preeta Samarasan have already brought contemporary Malaysian fiction to a global audience. It's only a question of time before someone from their neighbor to the south follows in their footsteps.

Mr. Dhume is the author of "My Friend the Fanatic: Travels with a Radical Islamist" (Skyhorse Publishing, 2009).

Pepper . . . and Salt

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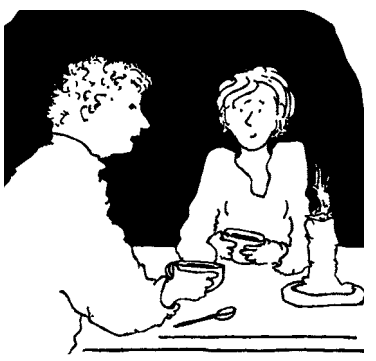


"What did we do before green tea?"

India's colliding art

A London exhibit is a showcase of works with blended themes

By Paul Levy

London

The Saatchi Gallery, that perfect blend of art and commerce, has found its ideal theme in its current show, "The Empire Strikes Back: Indian Art Today."

As the mobile phone has spread across the Indian subcontinent and PCs have become common, an emerging high-tech culture has led to enclaves of wealth and entrepreneurship. This in turn has led to a lively art world, where folk-art traditions collide with the computer-generated image; religious icons fuse with new materials; and the relationship between the economic climate and the art world is expressed in political, stereotype-busting, gender-conscious works of art.

The show's 11 large galleries feature works owned by Charles Saatchi and created by 24 living artists of Indian or Pakistani origin, some of whom live and work in America or Britain. The quality is variable, but at its considerable best—as in Atul Dodiya's homage to the late painter Bhupen Khakhar—it has some of the resonances of great Indian art of the past.

I particularly enjoyed gallery 8, with Subodh Gupta's paintings and sculptures of stainless steel and brass kitchen utensils, and Bharti Kher's collage of candy-colored, felt bindis (the spot on the forehead worn by married women).

Gallery 10 has three impressive, huge works and one small one by Jitish Kallat. The four-meter high "Eruda" is a black lead-covered sculpture of one of the boy booksellers who work at traffic lights on the streets of Mumbai. Though most have never been to school and are illiterate, they engage in authoritative conversations about the books they're selling.

While at the Saatchi Gallery, be certain to see Richard Wilson's masterpiece, "20:50," which floods part of the lower ground floor with a pond of reflective, used engine oil.

The exhibit is open until May 7.

Bharti Kher, 2010

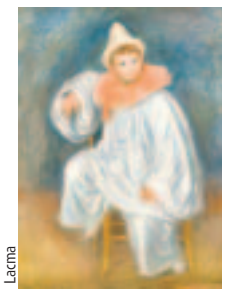
Bharti Kher's 'An Absence of Assignable Cause' (The Heart) (2007)

Renoir the modernist

By Candace Jackson

Few art lovers think of Pierre-Auguste Renoir as the kind of artist who experimented with modernism and hung out with avant-garde painters like Henri Matisse. An exhibition coming to the The Los Angeles County Museum of Art is setting out to change that.

The show, "Renoir in the 20th Century," first ran in Paris this autumn, opens Feb. 14 at Lacma and then travels to the Philadelphia Museum of Art in June. It's billed as the first major museum exhibition to focus on the later years of the artist's career and features more than 80 Renoir paintings, drawings and sculptures, along with a handful of works by younger artists such as Picasso and Matisse, who visited Renoir when he was living in southern France.



Lacma

Renoir's 'The White Pierrot' of 1901-02

In the last 20 to 30 years of his life, Renoir rejected some of the Impressionist hallmarks of his paintings—vibrant subjects in real-life settings—and embraced a more traditionalist style, including posed studio portraits and decoratively painted vases. Claudia Einecke, Lacma's curator for the show, says many of Renoir's most decorative and traditional paintings were done with a modernist flair, surprisingly cutting-edge at the time.

For example, several portraits include subjects in fancy costumes, like clowns and bullfighters, but with intentionally contrasting neutral background settings.

Unlike subjects in the fashionable, traditional paintings of the 18th century, Renoir's subjects wear costumes that have nothing to do with their actual lives. The paintings are meant to evoke a sense of "disorienting alienation," the show's catalog says.

"He can't be categorized so easily," says Ms. Einecke.

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